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ABSTRACT

A research-based pedagogy which emphasizes shared democratic values holds promise for promoting unity while accommodating diversity in American society. This literature review explores the role of educators in instilling democratic values that are embodied in the "American Creed": freedom, equality, justice, and human dignity for all people. Once part of education in the United States in the early 20th century, character education later fell into decline. Recent research, however, indicates a revival of interest in teaching values and ethical behavior and in ways in which values are taught directly and indirectly in U.S. schools. Research has also revealed no direct link between values and behavior, suggesting that people do not always have the courage of their convictions and that behavior modification may be a better way to change behavior and influence values. Also, values education tends to center on elementary education rather than secondary schools. Data from educational research and from practical experience of professionals indicate that integrating democratic values into the curriculum can reduce student prejudice, promote positive student attitudes toward diversity, and increase tolerance. Thirteen strategies for inculcating democratic values are recommended. (Contains 27 reference.) (ND)

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TEACHING DEMOCRATIC VALUES WHICH BALANCE UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

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by

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Democratic Values

Values, which are learned in early childhood, are shaped and solidified in adolescence. The formation of values provides exciting opportunities and awesome responsibilities for professional educators . Prejudice and discrimination toward those who are different usually appear first in the middle grades. Basic education represents a wonderful window of opportunity to instill democratic values which will prepare students for responsible citizenship (Allen & Stevens, 1994). In the near future teaching democratic values will take on even greater importance as changing demographics require us to prepare students for life in a society which will become increasingly diverse.

As the American population becomes more diverse, the actualization of our national motto, "e pluribus unum," is expected to become ever more difficult. Our educational system faces the great challenge of preparing a citizenry capable of creating a new, evolving "unum" which can maintain stability in our pluralistic society. Educators have a vital role to play in shaping our common destiny. Those who teach can make a tremendous contribution to the future of America by instilling the democratic values which are embodied in the American Creed.

The American Creed includes democratic values such as freedom, equality, justice, and human dignity for all people. These are the overarching national idealized values which unify American society. American Creed values are embodied in our great national documents, the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. They provide a framework for our national belief system, and they are central to our future as a nation. Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal (1944) recognized that most Americans faced a moral dilemma, however, because their belief system was inconsistent with societal practices. Myrdal believed that this moral dilemma was the force driving Americans toward a society which reflects freedom, equality, justice, and human dignity. If

internalized by students, American Creed values will continue to unify Americans from vastly different backgrounds and will stimulate continued progress toward social justice. A strong belief in American Creed values offers the best hope for closing the gap between our expressed democratic ideals and the realities of American society.

A research - based pedagogy which emphasizes shared democratic values holds promise for promoting unity while accommodating diversity in American society. A synthesis of research on values acquisition and prejudice reduction can be integrated effectively into educational programs to teach tolerance, respect, and appreciation for diversity. Through the judicious application of research effective strategies for teaching American Creed values can be designed and implemented to promote unity in our dynamic American society. To this end we need to glean lessons from past experience with values education in American schools which can be applied effectively in our classrooms.

Character Education

Character education was part of the educational program of virtually every school in America in the early decades of the 20th century. Since then the emphasis has been reduced greatly. By the 1950's formal character education programs had almost disappeared from the curriculum of American schools (McClellan, 1992; Yulish, 1980).

The decline of character education in curricular programs may have been precipitated by research conducted between 1924 and 1929 at Teachers College, Columbia University. This inquiry by the Institute of Social and Religious Research was the most comprehensive study of character education in America. It assessed the character-related behavior of more than 10,000 students from 23 US communities. The focus was on deceit and service. The investigation determined that deceit depended upon the situation. No relationship was discovered between student membership in organizations which taught honesty and honest student behavior. The results of this study led many educators to conclude that formal character education programs were ineffective (Hartshorne & May, 1930).

The rise of cultural pluralism and a series of decisions by the US Supreme Court also contributed to the decline of values education. Emphasis placed by the high court on the "establishment clause" of the First Amendment effectively curtailed the direct teaching of religious values in public schools. Fear of violating the wall of separation between church and state then caused educators in the public schools either to neglect moral education or to institute character education programs which were morally neutral.

The turbulent 1960's marked a revival of character education in two morally neutral programs, values clarification and moral reasoning. Although different in many ways, both approaches stressed that teachers, as facilitators of discussion, were not to impose personal or societal values on their students. Research into the effectiveness of values clarification and moral reasoning curricula indicates that both programs have some effect on student thinking. Neither program, however, appears to be effective in influencing student behavior (Leming, 1993).

Recently there has been a revival of interest in teaching values. In the 1994 Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, conducted by Phi Delta Kappa, three questions were asked concerning public support for character education. Responses to the poll indicate a strong and growing public support for character education. A majority of respondents favored courses on values and ethical behavior, up from 1987. More than 90% of those surveyed favored the teaching of core citizenship values. Two thirds of the subjects favored non devotional instruction about world religions (Elam, Rose & Gallup, 1994).

Educators who choose to implement character education programs in public schools usually attempt to focus on core citizenship values which are universally accepted by almost all cultures. Gibbs and Earley (1994) identify these core values as compassion, courage, courtesy, fairness, honesty, kindness, loyalty, perseverance, respect, and responsibility. These core values are compatible with the democratic values of freedom, equality, justice, and human dignity of the American Creed.

Thomas Lickona (1993) articulated a strong and eloquent argument for the teaching of core citizenship values when he wrote:

> Such values affirm our human dignity, promote the good of the individual and the common good, and protect our human rights. They meet the classic ethical tests of reversibility (would you want to be treated this way?) and universalizability (would you want all persons to act this way in a similar situation?). They define our responsibilities in a democracy, and they are recognized by all civilized people and taught by all enlightened creeds. Not to teach children these core ethical values is a grave moral failure (p.9).

Values are taught both directly and indirectly in our schools. What appears to be missing from most efforts, however, is a whole person focus on the mind, body, spirit synergism. Lickona (1993) points out that character education which is strictly intellectual misses the crucial emotional side of character which acts as a bridge between judgment and action. According to Lickona good character consists of knowing what is right, wanting to do the right thing, and doing what is right. He emphasizes that effective character education must help children to understand values, adopt or commit to them, and act upon these values in their personal lives.

Students are taught values through the formal curriculum, especially in literature, social science, and history classes. The celebration of certain holidays and the Pledge of Allegiance also teach values. Expectations for students to work hard, act responsibly, and respect others are ways of teaching values. Values need not be taught directly through character education curricula. Embedded in typical academic programs are many elements of character formation.

We know very well that our teaching profession is value laden. In our every action as role models and as authority figures ,we convey ethical principles to our students. In this invisible curriculum, which no teacher explicitly teaches but which all students learn, values are central. Through personal example, reinforcement of student behavior, selection of subject matter, and the design of a just school environment we can continue to transmit values in the way which great teachers always have done. Research indicates that learning environment, often referred to as part of the invisible curriculum, can have a positive effect

on student prosocial values. For example, students working in cooperative learning groups demonstrate greater mutual concern for one another. They are more accepting of students with disabilities, and they learn to interact better with students of other racial and ethnic groups through cooperative learning activities (Johnson, D., Maruyama, Johnson, R., Nelson & Skon, 1981; Slavin, 1990).

A synthesis of the character education research reveals several shared characteristics of schools that seem to have a strong positive impact on the development of student values. Students are encouraged to participate in the life of their school. Students are expected to behave responsibly, and they are provided with the opportunity to do so. In these schools students accept discipline as legitimate within the framework of shared group norms and change their behavior accordingly. Good character is fostered by orderly school and classroom environments and by clear rules which are fairly enforced. The research suggests that discipline, which students may help to establish, is an essential element in effective moral education (Leming , 1993).

Research which investigates values education from the perspective of the student also sheds important light on character education. To effectively teach character education teachers must follow the rules and show respect for all students. "Do as I say, not as I do" definitely does not work. Students say that model teachers earn respect by being fair, genuine, hard-working, caring, and good listeners. They give clear, consistent, sincere messages. Through their actions they communicate their commitment and high expectations for their students. Students believe that what a teacher does is more important that what a teacher says. To them actions clearly speak louder than words (Williams, 1993).

Research also reveals a major problem with values education. Although character education is often used in an attempt to promote good behavior, no direct link between values and behavior has been identified. In fact, values play a small role in predicting behavior (Lockwood, 1993). Unfortunately, people do not always have the courage to live

by their convictions. To change behavior it might be more productive to focus on behavior modification, which may affect values as well. It has been suggested that people think as they act, that attitudes follow behavior (Bem, 1970).

Another problem is specific to secondary schools. Educators at the secondary level often are reluctant to become involved in character education. Even though most irresponsible acts are committed by adolescents and by adults, most values education programs are concentrated at the elementary level.

Perhaps character education is targeted at the elementary level because it is widely recognized that values are learned at a very young age. Some child psychologists maintain that our basic personality is formed by age three or four. Most agree that children come to school with their values well established. These values, which are modified throughout life, become more resistant to change as people mature. Goble and Brooks (1983) contend that most children, by the time they reach junior high school age, have acquired values to a point where the needed approach shifts from prevention to rehabilitation for those who have internalized negative values. They believe that for character education to be effective at the secondary level students must be taught to change negative attitudes into positive attitudes. But psychiatrist William Glasser (1965), author of Reality Therapy, insists that it is never too late to teach values which strengthen character. He concludes that "the teaching of responsibility is the most important task of all higher animals... That it can be taught only to the young is not true...Responsibility can be learned at any age" (p. 43).

There is no doubt that character education becomes more complex and perhaps less efficient as students become more mature. To effectively transmit positive values which enhance the character of students we need teaching strategies equal to the challenge.

Teaching Democratic Values

Howard Kirschenbaum, speaking at the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development's 1994 Annual Conference, identifies four strategies for teaching values. As well as teaching about values, teachers can demonstrate good values, teach skills for acting

ethically and morally, and encourage young people to internalize values and make their own good decisions. Teachers, as good role models, who set positive examples and share their democratic convictions can have a positive effect on their students. Skills include how to resist peer pressure, maintain self-respect, resolve conflicts in nonviolent ways, and stand up for what one believes in. By giving students opportunities to make choices and to respond to moral issues,teachers allow students to apply the principles which they are learning. When developing strategies for character education, Kirschenbaum cautions that educators need to teach values in conjunction with parents and the larger community.

Teaching the democratic values embodied in our great national documents can reduce student prejudice and promote positive student attitudes toward tolerance, respect, and appreciation of difference. American Creed beliefs in freedom, equality, justice, and human dignity are the key to prejudice reduction and to the realization of the vision for America articulated by the framers of our Constitution. Democratic values, which affect the American social conscience, have the greatest potential for the reduction of discrimination and prejudice. In addition to instilling democratic values, other teaching strategies also are effective for teaching positive attitudes toward racial difference.

Research reveals that young children are very much aware of racial differences. The racial attitudes of young children mirror those of adults (Cross, 1991). Kenneth and Mamie Clark (1950) identified White bias, a tendency for young children to prefer white to brown dolls. White bias reflects accurately the attitudinal norms of American society. White children, beginning at age four, make own-group racial preferences. Mexican American and African American children make both out-group and own-group preferences (Banks, 1994).

Research demonstrates that teachers can help their students to develop more positive racial attitudes through classroom interventions. White bias can be reduced but not eliminated through positive reinforcement of students when they choose positive adjectives to describe brown figures (Williams & Edwards, 1969). Recognizing difference among

the faces of minority group members increases interracial contact and is effective in reducing prejudice (Katz & Zalk, 1978). Classroom reading materials that are multiethnic have helped white children to develop more positive racial attitudes (Litcher & Johnson, 1969). Participation in cooperative learning activities, which also has a positive effect on the academic achievement of girls and students of color, helps Mexican American, African American, and White children to choose more friends from outside racial groups and to develop more positive racial attitudes (Banks, 1994).

James Banks (1994), a recognized authority on multicultural education, believes that teachers should support and defend moral and ethical positions that are consistent with democratic values. He recommends teaching strategies which are personalized, interactive, cooperative, and involvement oriented. When teaching multicultural content, an area where a variety of different perspectives is valued, he views teacher-centered instruction as especially inappropriate. To teach democratic values effectively, the voices of all students must be heard and legitimized in a spirit of cooperative interdependence .

Curricular interventions also hold promise for developing positive racial attitudes in students. A study by Yawkey (1973) demonstrated the positive effects of selected multiethnic social studies readings on the attitudes of White children toward African Americans. Experimental research by Shirley (1988) found that integrating multicultural activities into English, social studies, and reading curricula had a positive effect on the racial attitudes of racially integrated students in fifth- and sixth-grade classes. Reading and discussing stories about Native Americans was found to have a positive effect on the racial attitudes of fifth grade students (Fisher, 1965). Although the results of curriculum-intervention studies have been inconsistent, they have demonstrated that the positive portrayal of diverse groups of people in the school curriculum can have a positive effect on students.

Manning and Baruth (1996) emphasize the importance of teacher knowledge, attitudes, and skills which work together in the classroom learning environment. Teachers

need to understand the implications of social class, culture, ethnicity, and race for the learning process; and they need to understand culturally different learners so that they can deliver instruction which is developmentally and culturally appropriate. Teachers can develop more positive attitudes toward diversity through participation in professional development activities and through interaction with people from diverse backgrounds. Cross cultural communication skills are extremely important for teachers when they are interacting with students and parents from various ethnic groups, races, social classes, and cultures. Teacher knowledge, attitudes, and skills interact in the classroom to enhance academic achievement and to instill egalitarian attitudes and democratic values.

From educational research and from the practical experience of professionals we have learned that character education can be effective in transmitting democratic values to students. By integrating American Creed values into the formal curriculum and by teaching democratic values through the invisible curriculum we can avoid the divisiveness often associated with specific character education programs. For inculcating democratic values the following strategies are recommended:

Effective Strategies for Teaching Democratic Values

- Instill democratic American Creed Values (freedom, equality, justice, and human dignity) found in our great national documents
- Educate the whole person by focusing on student knowledge, behavior, and feeling
- Choose content which honors and rewards virtue in exemplars who represent diverse groups
- Help students differentiate the faces of people from outside racial groups
- Communicate clear, consistent, sincere, high expectations for all students
- Develop student skills in resisting peer pressure, maintaining self-respect, and resolving conflicts in nonviolent ways
- Be a good role model through positive personal example
- Use and require respectful language
- Use the creation of and the even-handed enforcement of just classroom rules to teach core citizenship values
- Reinforce the diligent work and virtuous behavior of students with praise and appreciation
- Have students work together cooperatively in heterogeneous groups
- Involve peers, parents, and community
- Require students to defend their beliefs by relating them to democratic values

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